

# Development of Buddhist Cultural Creation based on Cultural Semiotics Theory

-- Taking Nanjing Dabao'en Temple as an Example

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**Abstract:** Cultural semiotics, as a unique theoretical framework, provides a profound way of thinking for the dissemination and interpretation of culture. This article takes the Dabao'en Temple in Nanjing as an example and explores its application in cultural and creative development from the perspective of Buddhist cultural semiotics theory. As a representative heritage of Chinese Buddhist culture, Nanjing Dabao'en Temple contains rich cultural symbols such as religion, history, and art, which is of great significance for cultural and creative development. Firstly, the research value of cultural semiotics in the development of Buddhist cultural creation was explored. Secondly, it explores how the elements in Da Bao En Temple, as cultural symbols, can be reconstructed in modern society to meet the aesthetic and needs of contemporary people. Through the artistic transformation of cultural symbols and other means, Da Bao En Temple has been able to radiate new vitality in cultural and creative products. In addition, this article also analyzes the strategies used in the design process of Da Bao En Temple's cultural and creative products. Through in-depth research, it can not only help Dabao'en Temple's cultural and creative products better achieve cultural dissemination, but also provide useful reference for the development of other similar cultural heritage. In summary, this article explores how cultural symbols can radiate new vitality in contemporary times by studying the application of cultural and creative development based on the theory of Buddhist cultural semiotics in the Dabao'en Temple in Nanjing. This not only helps to promote cultural inheritance, but also provides useful references for the sustainable development of the cultural and creative industry.

**Keywords:** Cultural Semiotics; Cultural and Creative Development; Buddhist Culture; Da Bao En Temple.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Since the 21st century, with the continuous development of social economy and the demand for consumption upgrading, the temple cultural and creative industry has further expanded and deepened. On the one hand, the cultural and creative products of temples are becoming increasingly diverse, expanding from traditional handicrafts to various fields such as cultural and creative design, digital media, cultural performances, and ecological agriculture; On the other hand, the temple cultural and creative industry is also increasingly becoming specialized and industrialized, with more and more enterprises and institutions entering the field, promoting the development and growth of the entire industry.

As the first Buddhist temple in southern China, Nanjing Dabao'en Temple was once the center of Buddhist culture in China during the Ming and Qing dynasties, containing enormous cultural, religious, and architectural values. The glass tower of Bao'en Temple was once a landmark of Nanjing City, and from its completion until its destruction, it has always been the tallest building in China. In addition, the innovative full body glass building technology of the Bao'en Temple's glass tower has led Western missionaries to call it one of the Seven Wonders of the World, along with the Great Wall and Italy's Pizza. Until now, the Glass Pagoda is still regarded by many foreigners as a symbol of China. Against the backdrop of the "1+1+1" document system in which the Nanjing Municipal Government vigorously promotes the construction of a "humanistic green city", strives to create a beautiful landmark city in China, and constructs the cultural

industry development of Nanjing during the 13th Five Year Plan period, the Nanjing government has issued a large number of policies to support the development of the cultural industry, fully developing the "Buddha culture" and "gratitude culture" of the Nanjing Baoen Temple, which are of great significance for promoting the cultural revival of the ancient capital of Jinling.

### 1.2. Research Significance

The development of cultural and creative products at Nanjing Dabao'en Temple helps to promote the rejuvenation of Buddhist culture; Studying the design of Buddhist cultural and creative products through cultural semiotics can bring cultural semiotics into the development of cultural and creative products, providing reference for the development of similar Buddhist scenic spots; Especially through the summary of regional cultural characteristics and research on related derivative designs, the productive protection of cultural heritage has been strengthened, and the development of local cultural tourism industry and regional cultural creative industry has been promoted [5], which is bound to enhance the influence of Nanjing's cultural industry.

## 2. Overview of Semiotics in Buddhist Culture

### 2.1. Definition of Buddhist Cultural Semiotics

Cultural semiotics is the study of culture as a symbol or symbolic system. Sociologist Max Weber believes that culture is equivalent to symbols and human representation systems. The study of culture is the study of symbols or various representation systems used by humans; Pierce

believes that there are two attitudes towards using symbols as a discipline: one is to place semiotics among other disciplines; the other is to use semiotics as a tool for research in other disciplines [2]. Therefore, in the early stage, cultural semiotics only existed as a branch of semiotics and a research method in the field of culture. Until the 1973 All Soviet Conference, Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, a representative figure of the Tartu Semiotics School, and other members of the school, reinterpreted culture from the perspective of information theory, proposing for the first time the concept of "Cultural Semiotics" and determining culture as the only research object of the Tartu School, proposing a systematic definition and methodology.

## **2.2. Division of Cultural Symbols**

The semiologist Saussure's theory of binary relations divides symbols into two directions of meaning: signifier and signified. The signifier refers to the meaning of the object represented by the symbol, and the signified refers to the internal meaning of the symbol, which is the profound concept it contains. Various cultural symbols in Buddhism have both the external image meaning, which is its signifier, and the internal deep connotation it refers to, so it conforms to the definition of semiotics, it has symbolic meaning [4].

## **2.3. Analysis of Successful Cases of Buddhist Cultural and Creative Products**

Most Buddhist cultural and creative products in scenic areas are severely flat and homogeneous, without exploring the characteristics of their own cultural elements. Most products directly use patterns for simple mechanical printing, and only a few Buddhist cultural and creative products such as the Palace Museum and Dunhuang Museum have cultural elements that match the products, reflecting the characteristics of their cultural elements.

In 2018, Faxi Temple became popular due to an official set of Buddhist peripherals, including canvas bags, talismans, celebrity films, etc. The main highlight of this set is the combination of Buddhist copywriting and online buzzwords, which not only meets the functionality of cultural and creative products, but also meets the aesthetic and psychological needs of consumers.

Due to its modern design approach that incorporates the strong religious and cultural elements of Buddhism, the cultural and creative works of Faxi Temple have a groundbreaking design consciousness. They showcase the slightly serious Buddha statues and great wisdom of Buddhism in a humorous and easily accepted way, using more popular flat illustrations as a means of expression. Distinction from traditional Buddhist cultural and creative products has brought religious cultural and creative products closer to users.

# **3. Comprehensive Analysis of Cultural and Creative Products of Nanjing Dabao'en Temple**

## **3.1. Analysis of Difficulties in Developing Cultural and Creative Products at Nanjing Dabao'en Temple**

Through on-site research, it was found that most of the products of Nanjing Dabao'en Temple are severely flattened. On the one hand, most cultural and creative products are relatively flat product categories such as bookmarks and

postcards, which are too homogeneous and ordinary in form; On the other hand, most cultural and creative products of the "product" type, such as insulated cups and keychains, only use simple texture methods to assign cultural elements related to Bao'en Temple to the product. There is no sufficient reason for the combination of symbolic cultural elements with their product carriers.

There is a large cultural and creative store area in the scenic area of Nanjing Dabao'en Temple, selling a wide range of cultural and creative products from bookmarks and postcards to aromatherapy and tea sets. Overall, it is closely integrated with modern design forms. However, most products lack the exploration of the cultural connotation of Dabao'en Temple itself and the regional characteristics of Nanjing. Most cultural and creative products may only use the cultural symbols of Dabao'en Temple on the surface, but lack the understanding of its underlying history. A deep understanding and presentation of philosophical and cultural connotations. This may lead to a lack of genuine emotion and identification in the product.

## **3.2. Analysis of the Innovation Path of Cultural and Creative Products in Nanjing Dabao'en Temple**

### **3.2.1. Deep Excavation of History and Culture**

When designing cultural and creative products, delve deeply into the historical, religious background, and cultural connotations of Nanjing Dabao'en Temple, and integrate these elements into the product design. By telling the stories, legends, and Buddhist philosophy of temples, we imbue our products with deeper emotions and connotations. Taking the Da Bao En Temple in Nanjing as an example, firstly, extracting cultural elements that are highly distinctive of Bao En Temple and more unique compared to other similar scenic spots, such as the glass tower, glass arch, and Bao En culture, is more advantageous than extracting Buddha statues, murals, and so on. Secondly, as a holy land of Buddhism in the south, based on the restored Buddhist scenes presented in the Nanjing Dabao'en Temple Site Park, the connection between Buddhist culture and Nanjing Dabao'en Temple can be fully explored to explore its cultural connotations. Combining with the current popular temple economy, we can explore the great wisdom of praying for blessings and Buddhist meditation, better catering to the preferences of young people.

### **3.2.2. Extracting the Artistic Conception of Buddhist Zen**

The author believes that the "degree" of grasping the design of Buddhist cultural and creative products lies in extracting the widely accepted "artistic conception" in Buddhism, rather than directly extracting elements of graphic symbols. For example, in the Nanjing Dabao'en Temple Ruins Park, there is an exhibition hall called "Millennium Looking Back", which features a 3D three-dimensional Buddha head and Master Xuanzang gazing at each other. At a glance of the millennium, when extracting such cultural elements, the artistic conception of "Millennium Looking Back" can be extracted, which has stronger universality.

### **3.2.3. Combining with Local Regional Culture**

When designing cultural and creative products, they can be fully integrated with local cultural characteristics to avoid creating narrow and less distinctive cultural and creative designs. When developing cultural and creative products with the theme of Nanjing Dabao'en Temple, the cultural characteristics of Jinling can be fully combined. The

combination with regional culture can be considered from several aspects. For example, when designing hand gifts and aromatherapy for Dabao'en Temple, the author combines Jinling culture from the visual, connotation, graphic and other aspects. From the perspective of connotation, the widely circulated ancient poem "Invisible from heaven and earth, Jinling surpasses Lingxiao in the human world" is selected to fully showcase the extraordinary scenery of the four seasons of Jinling from the perspective of smell and vision; From a visual perspective, the product has extracted the four most representative tourist attractions from the four seasons in Nanjing's people's minds on packaging, and presented them in modern line form on the product packaging; From a graphical perspective, the city flower "plum blossom" of Nanjing was selected as the main image of the fragrance, combined with the fragrance of the four seasons of Jinling as the fragrance, giving it a typical Buddhist concept of "one flower, one world" as the ideological core, making it more distinctive cultural characteristics and easier to evoke emotional resonance.

### 3.3. Case Analysis of Cultural and Creative Product Design: Six Revocation of Wind Chime Guard Design

#### 3.3.1. Design Concept

Through market research and analysis, combined with Buddhist culture and gratitude culture, the original colors, shapes, graphics, and cultural connotations of this cultural

element are extracted in the context of Buddhist cultural semiotics. The popular praying culture and Buddhist culture among young people are integrated, and the gratitude temple culture is reintroduced into the public's view through product means in a modern way, revitalizing the great gratitude temple culture.

#### 3.3.2. Element Extraction

Extracting multi-level cultural elements: The extraction and application of cultural elements have three levels: the extraction of external images at the first level, the extraction of behavioral processes at the second level, and the extraction of spiritual cores at the third level. In terms of appearance, representative wind chime elements from the glass tower of Da Bao En Temple are selected and symbolized to reproduce in a simple form; In terms of behavior, the process of extracting the wind chime swaying on the eaves of the temple in the wind. When the user hangs it on a bag or car, the wind chime like guard swings with the movement of the carrier; The extraction of the spiritual core perfectly integrates the meanings of wind chimes and auspicious beasts with the carrier of defense. Wind chimes have the meaning of praying and warding off evil spirits, and in Buddhism, wind chimes have the meaning of warning and calming and nurturing nature, containing great wisdom such as "forbidden wisdom" in Buddhism. The sound of wind chimes is also endowed with the meaning of preaching and reciting scriptures.

#### 3.3.3. Scheme Effect Display



Fig 1. Left: Introduction to design patterns (self drawn)  
Right: Extraction of cultural elements (self drawn)

## 4. Summary

Buddhist culture is a treasure in Chinese civilization, and Nanjing Dabao'en Temple is a traditional Buddhist temple that contains rich Buddhist cultural heritage. Strengthening the development and design of cultural and creative products at Nanjing Dabao'en Temple can not only revitalize precious Buddhist culture, but also provide important reference value for the development of similar Buddhist cultural and creative products. This article analyzes the current situation and shortcomings of cultural and creative products of Nanjing Dabao'en Temple through the use of Buddhist semiotics, extracts its unique cultural elements, and summarizes some beneficial experiences of Buddhist cultural and creative design through specific design practices, achieving the unity of artistic form and ideological connotation of Buddhist cultural and creative design.

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